

Reducing Barriers to Entry for the Direct Sales of Local Foods in Ohio  
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According to the US Census of Agriculture, Ohio ranks in the top ten states for direct farm sales. Other signs of growth include an increasing number of farm markets, farmers markets, wineries, produce auctions, and chef grower networks. The growth of grower conferences such as the Mid-Ohio Growers, the Southwest Ohio Vegetable Conference and the Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association (OEFFA) shows growers are interested in growing and providing local foods throughout Ohio.

When making direct sales, Ohio growers and marketers are voicing concerns regarding the barriers to entry they face. In most cases, this relates to the sales of eggs, meats and cottage foods at farm markets, farmers markets and other retail locations. Current laws, rules and interpretations vary significantly. Growers in one county face steeper costs for licensing and equipment than others. Some aspects of these laws are not up to date with food safety research.

To combat this issue and to make a level playing field, OSU Extension partnered with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and The John Glenn College of Public Affairs. Together, they completed a multi-faceted project to gain insight into the rules and regulations affecting farm direct marketers in Ohio.

The team conducted literature reviews in the areas of barriers in other states and food safety concerns relating to the sales of local foods. A chart was developed to show the top direct marketing states in the US and Ohio to give a side by side comparison of laws and regulations to gain a better understanding of how Ohio compares to similar states. A comparative analysis was used to compare the available information for producers regarding the implementation of the laws and rules of each state. Additionally, listening sessions were held across Ohio and surveys were conducted of both farmers market managers and health department sanitarians to gain insight into current processes and potential improvements.

Four themes were identified as a result of the project. These themes include: 1. The confusion over regulations and oversight needs to be addressed by the state and partnering agencies/groups; 2. Issues relating to food safety need to be addressed at farmers markets; 3. Education is needed, possibly in a one-stop-shop location for producers to go for information; and 4. Ohio Should Consider a Farmers Market Manager Certification to address other issues.

Initial work to reducing the barriers outlined in the report include addressing the need for educational resources. The team published a direct marketing eggs factsheet, a law bulletin about selling food foods at the farm and has plans more factsheets. The project's findings are being shared with this and other groups in order to address the

issues and possible changes which could help reduce barriers to entry for Ohio's growers and marketers.

#### Learning Objectives:

- Understand the current barriers to direct marketing local foods in Ohio.
- Realize the differences between Ohio laws and regulations compared to leading direct agricultural marketing states.
- Recognize the need for food safety guidelines as part of Ohio's laws and regulations regarding growing and processing local foods.
- Appreciate the value of direct marketing of agricultural products in local communities.
- Gain insight into the need to improve opportunities in local agriculture for Ohio residents.
- Appreciate the need to provide local foods that meet the fresh market preferences of the diverse cultures residing in Ohio.

#### Short Description:

Ohio ranks in the top ten states for direct farm sales. When making direct sales, growers and marketers are voicing concerns regarding barriers to entry. In most cases, this relates to the sales of eggs, meats and cottage foods. Current laws, rules and interpretations vary significantly. Growers in one county face steeper costs for licensing and equipment than others.

Several colleges at OSU partnered to combat the issues. Four themes were identified as a result of the project. These include: 1. Confusion over regulations and oversight that needs to be addressed; 2. Issues relating to food safety direct marketing sites; 3. Education is needed, possibly in a one-stop-shop location for producers; and 4. The need for a Farmers Market Manager Certification to address other issues.

This presentation will share the project's findings in order to address the issues and possible changes which could help reduce barriers to entry for Ohio's growers and marketers.